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Empowering a Community

*The USDA Forest Service's Role
in Rebuilding Los Angeles*

U.S.D.A., NAL

JUN 05 2001

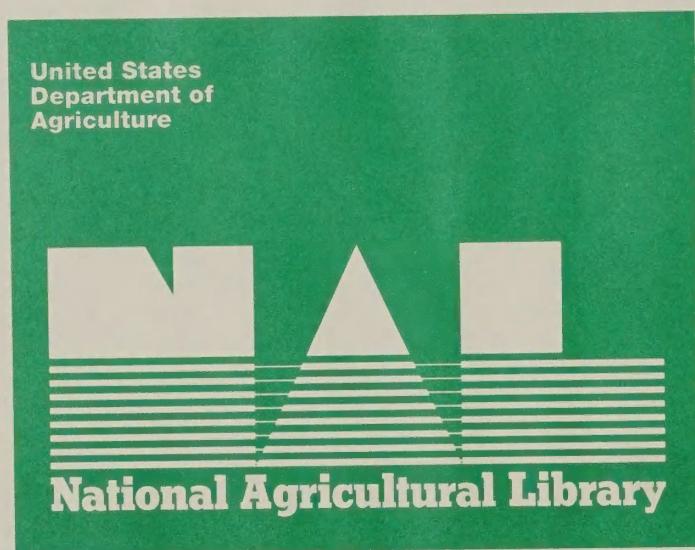
Cataloging Prep



Sowing the Seeds of Change

"The Urban Greening Initiative and Opportunity LA programs are truly important projects for the Forest Service. They are giving us a chance to build relationships with the urban communities. And they are providing us a true opportunity to make a difference in people's lives."

F. Dale Robertson, Chief
USDA Forest Service



White House Administration

Presidential Task Force

Housing & Urban Development (**HUD**)

Department of Agriculture (**USDA**)

Office of Management & Budget (**OMB**)

Small Business Administration (**SBA**)

Office of Personnel Management (**OPM**)

Department of Commerce

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Leader: David Beightol

United States Department of Agriculture

Secretary Mike Espy

Cleo Davis, USDA Task Force
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Forest Service

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Paul Johnson, Regional Forester Representative

Opportunity LA

Terry Ellis

Program Director

Urban Greening

John Ronald

Program Director

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Empowering a Community

The USDA Forest Service's Role
in Rebuilding Los Angeles

Sowing the Seeds of Change

"This is our first urban forestry project. We are providing tree planting in Korea Town. And we're also taking this opportunity to do community organizing – including working together with a Latino group."

Johng Ho Song, Korean Youth Center
(Located in South Central Los Angeles' "Korea Town")
Urban Greening Initiative grantee

"This is hard work. But I have two kids to take care of and it's a blessing just to have a job. I want to work. I don't want to receive welfare, and I'm not going to stay home and wait for a job."

Sue Rogers, 35
South Central Los Angeles resident
Opportunity LA employee

I Introduction: A New Step — Possibly an Evolution



“The riots brought a lot of groups to the surface. Bonding between these people is going to benefit this community. This is a classic environmental education opportunity for the Forest Service. It is the beginning to a new step — possibly an evolution.”

“Urban and agro forestry crosses racial and cultural boundaries, bringing people together on neutral ground for a common goal. I feel very proud that the Forest Service is providing a means to facilitate this bonding. We are a catalyst in the ongoing effort to forge a new, more tolerant society.”

Randi R. Jorgensen,
USDA Forest Service
Public Affairs Specialist
Angeles National Forest

Background

After the Disorder — A Strategy to Respond: Needs, Goals, Solutions

The April, 1992 acquittal of four Los Angeles city police officers in the beating of motorist Rodney King generated two days of rage that resulted in 50 deaths, 2,300 people wounded, 17,000 arrested, and \$1 billion in destruction to businesses and homes.

Before the smoke had cleared, members of the Los Angeles community approached the federal government with visions of hope and a strategy for the future.

Their vision was melded with prompt actions by the Presidential Administration to create an unprecedented opportunity of cooperation between the government, business, and citizens of Los Angeles.

The People and Place

Los Angeles County includes 9 million individuals who speak no fewer than 106 languages, and represent 96 different countries.

Resident population in the civil disorder-impacted South Central Los Angeles area: 50 percent Hispanic; 45 percent African-American; 3 percent Asian and Southeast Asian; and 2 percent American Indian.

Unemployment in this area has reached an astounding 50 percent — including those who have dropped out of official labor force statistics, along with people counted in the 8.6 percent unemployment figures.

Unquestionably, unemployment is chronic here. It crosses the lines of race as well as generations. After factoring in the basic costs of living, shelter, food and clothing — even many **employed** Los Angeles area residents still earn subsistence wages.

Median income in the affected civil unrest areas is approximately \$18,000. And, for people at the poverty threshold, annual income remains less than \$10,000 in actual cost-of-living (minus federal and state assistance) adjusted dollars. Yet the price of an average home in South Central Los Angeles hovers around \$110,000.

Furthermore, the percentage of single-parent households in this largely neglected area of Los Angeles is increasing.

Certainly, the more subtle impacts of economic depression buttress these hard statistics of economic difficulty: imperiled schools; community deterioration; collapsing infrastructure; culture shock resulting from an immigrant population explosion; and scapegoating based on insidious racial prejudice and discrimination.

Facilitating the Healing Process

In May, 1992, immediately following the violent disturbances in Los Angeles, the U.S. Department of Agriculture — in conjunction with the Presidential Task Force on the Los Angeles recovery efforts — identified the following objectives for the affected residents and their communities:

- ❖ **Trigger immediate and long term employment.**
- ❖ **Facilitate the healing process.**
- ❖ **Develop community leadership skills to insure long-term commitment and involvement among community members.**

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service was asked to support these objectives by taking specific action to promote:

- **Long-term urban tree planting, agroforestry, and community horticulture involvement of young people and adults in Los Angeles's economically distressed communities.**
- **Immediate and potential long-term employment opportunities to provide economically productive and stable communities.**
- **An empowered and responsible citizenry.**
- **Models for sustainable communities that address the underlying causes of racial and ethnic strife.**

The Department of Agriculture's strategy — outlined in this document — addresses the long-term involvement of young people and adults residing in economically distressed Los Angeles communities through direct involvement in: urban forestry; community horticulture; and urban agriculture activities.

The strategy — two individual programs — is designed to create immediate and long-term employment opportunities while simultaneously creating models for sustainable multi-racial and multi-cultural communities that begin to address the underlying causes of racial and ethnic strife.

Strategy: The Government as Catalyst

Two Solutions

"Peter V. Gleberroth (Rebuild LA Chairman), a frequent critic of government bureaucracy, praised the Agriculture Department for moving swiftly to set up the new programs (Urban Greening Initiative and Opportunity LA). 'There wasn't a big debate,' he said. 'It didn't take six months or six years.'"

Los Angeles Times
June 26, 1992

Utilizing the collective input, vision and experience of various local Los Angeles area grassroots groups and organizations, as well as a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations, the Department of Agriculture — through the USDA Forest Service — identified and developed two specific strategies to accomplish these important goals:

The Urban Greening Initiative

A mere four weeks after the Los Angeles disturbances, a special partnership — between the California Department of Forestry, TreePeople, Los Angeles Conservation Corp, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service, and Forest Service — launched a \$2.75 million community matching funds grant program to encourage urban and agro forestry (tree planting, greening and gardening) projects among nonprofit and non-federal government agencies within Los Angeles County's traditionally neglected areas. Administered through the USDA Forest Service, State and Private Forestry programs, the initiative is targeted to build self-esteem and simultaneously create jobs and job training opportunities for area residents in tree planting, tree care, and environmental management — leading to entry level employment in the nursery, landscape, and arboriculture industries. The program also encourages networking between a diversity of cultural and racial inner-city factions.

Opportunity LA

The Department of Agriculture initiated a full scale \$5.8 million employment opportunity program targeted to the city's unemployed population. The 647 community members — ranging in age from 18 to 63 — who signed up to be temporary national forest employees for the six-month program, received training and skill-building tasks that they could take back to their neighborhoods. This special Forest Service program created a temporary positive, productive environment where these citizens of the riot-impacted areas could train, improve their job resumes, and earn a living — as their communities likewise recuperated and rehabilitated. The program provided a constructive steppingstone and opportunity for people to get on with their lives in the wake of the civil unrest.

Hope and Healing — Successful Results

"This is an exciting collaboration. A way for the people of Los Angeles to restore themselves. You (the Forest Service) gave the people of Los Angeles a means to get started — and enough time to give their projects a chance to work . . . There is a level of empowerment out there. With a little bit of support and group effort, we can change L.A.

All cities have a Rodney King incident waiting to happen."

Brenda Funches, Managing Advisor
LA Harvest (*Urban Greening Initiative*
grant recipient)

"I've never worked with Blacks before. We found respect for each other instead of fighting each other. Now, if we see people we know from Opportunity LA on the street, we can say 'Hi.' The Forest Service is keeping a lot of people out of trouble. One guy I know says his time working for Opportunity LA is the longest he's been out of jail."

Armando Rivera
Opportunity LA Employee

As this report outlines, both of these approaches — the *Urban Greening Initiative* and **Opportunity LA** — have already reaped successful results. They have also provided positive, realistic examples of what can be done to begin to address the malaise — the underlying causes of frustration, desperation, and racial and ethnic strife — in our nation's urban areas.

Through a myriad of new partnerships, these people — participants in both programs — came forth **themselves**, with a desire to take the "initiative" to help create the promise of a better future for themselves and their inner-city Los Angeles neighborhoods.

Certainly, the benefits growing out of these two programs include: potential future employment; providing new opportunities for self-esteem building; citizens better informed about Southern California's natural resource issues; environmental education opportunities; increased values for urban and agro forestry — tree planting, greening and gardening; exposure of more inner-city residents to urban ecosystem management (horticulture, tree care and planting, etc.); networking and bonding between a diversity of groups; and sustaining a new community energy.

Economic Success

Under **Opportunity LA**, 647 unemployed Los Angeles residents went to work in a special employment and job skills training program.

At the same time, under **The Urban Greening Initiative**, 33 culturally diverse groups and organizations serving traditionally neglected portions of Los Angeles County embarked on urban forestry community improvement projects designed to better their environment and create jobs, as well as promote and enhance cross-cultural relations. The program's 33 approved projects represent more than 300 full-time jobs and more than 200 temporary positions.

This new potential for urban forestry jobs can mean long-term job and business development opportunities in urban forest management. (Currently, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power combines with Southern California Edison to spend more than \$25 million per year on pruning trees under their power lines alone — illustrating work needs in this area.)

Environmental Success

Under the efforts of the **Urban Greening Initiative**, vast numbers of new trees and agroforestry plantings will have a significant **positive** impact on the Los Angeles urban ecosystem.

Environmental benefits from such comprehensive urban forestry programs include: creating small spots of green in a sea of concrete and asphalt; cooler inner-city areas; lower utility bills; lower levels of air pollution; water conservation; lessening of storm water pollution; and a reduction of materials flowing into landfills.

In addition, **Opportunity LA** employees helped reduce a large backlog of necessary work projects on four Southern California national forests. Their work projects ranged from recreation site and trail maintenance, to erosion control and watershed improvement, to wildland fire suppression.

Community and Personal Success

Just as important are the intangible benefits resulting from these two programs' efforts . . .

Through the **Urban Greening Initiative**: peaceful retreats; pride in neighborhoods; providing a common ground to meet, bond and plan for sustainable, positive change; and building important networking and bonding between a diversity of groups and individuals.

Through **Opportunity LA**: new opportunities for self-esteem building; training and skill building tasks; and important networking and bonding between a diversity of groups and individuals.

To be sure, not all results will be evident immediately. But through these two progressive programs, the seeds have been planted. Subsequent growth and beneficial outcomes — that could include long-term sustainable economic development and an increase in property values within inner-city neighborhoods — will continue to sprout and develop over the next several years.

Setting an Example

The creation and implementation of these two programs can also serve as a creative “how to” approach to urban issues in other cities. There’s no question that metropolitan areas elsewhere in this country harbor the same symptoms that led to the notorious 1992 Los Angeles unrest.

The Department of Agriculture’s actions and partnerships in Los Angeles, therefore, could serve as a model in other cities to help prevent and remedy the unfortunate conditions that precipitated the violent eruption in Los Angeles.

II Urban Greening Initiative



“With this program the Forest Service has successfully opened the door into an area we had not been visible in before.

The bonds that we are now forming are building a bridge on which we will continue to go forward in the future.

And if it can work here, it can also work in other cities.”

**John Ronald, USDA Forest Service
Urban Greening Initiative
Program Manager**

“You have to take a lot of little success stories and replicate them. I really believe as this program becomes successful, other cities are going to come here to learn from this model.”

**Alfred A. DelliBovi, Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development**

Quoth Webster: “EMPOWER – To give ability to; to enable, permit.”

Blueprint for Other Cities

“Urban forestry is proving to be as much about people as it is about trees.”

Larry Costello, Chair
California Urban Forestry
Advisory Council

“Urban forests are the buffer that makes for sustained, viable and livable cities. A healthy urban forest indicates a healthy, viable community. A deteriorating urban forest is one of the first indicators of a community in decay and decline.”

Andy Lipkis, President
TreePeople (*Urban Greening Initiative*
Grantee)
Los Angeles

In September, 1992 — a mere four months after the Los Angeles outbreak of civil unrest — 33 culturally and ethnically diverse Los Angeles *Urban Greening Initiative* grantee groups and organizations rolled up their sleeves to begin work in a common, unified effort to improve the plight of the city's afflicted and traditionally neglected areas through urban forestry.

The USDA Forest Service, State and Private Forestry branch — in partnership with TreePeople, the University of California Cooperative Extension in Los Angeles County, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps — all collaborated on the program's successful implementation strategy.

Matching grants totaling \$2,750,000 were made available to: non-profit groups; community service organizations; non-federal government agencies; and volunteer community greening groups. All grant applicants were required to serve Los Angeles County's traditionally neglected areas — including those affected by the April, 1992 disturbances.

Projects include: tree planting and maintenance along inner-city neighborhood streets; creating new green spaces with trees and ground cover; planting urban gardens; and helping prepare tree planting and urban forestry site plans for Los Angeles communities. All projects also provide the development of basic skills in forestry, arboriculture, landscape design, and pest management.

The 33 approved ***Urban Greening Initiative*** projects represent more than 300 full-time jobs and more than 200 temporary positions.

Initially, a broad range of 86 indigenous inner-city Los Angeles organizations and agencies responded to the extensive grant outreach efforts — requesting more than \$9 million in matching funds. The proposals came from a diverse cross-section of Los Angeles communities — representing a broad cultural, geographical, and demographical variety, including youth groups, municipalities, county, family, neighborhood, civic, church, ethnic, and educational organizations.

Twenty-four of the selected 33 projects received their total requested funding amount; the remaining grantees received approximately 80 percent of their original request. Terms of the grants require that all proposed projects be completed within 18 months. (This somewhat generous time period was deemed more advantageous to insuring optimum, successful results.)

Collaborating on: Work Needs, Objectives, Goals

In October, 1992, representatives from the 33 grantee groups met in a networking session to update and discuss their individual projects' goals and efforts. A remarkable interaction between various ethnic backgrounds was evident throughout the entire session. The common positive bond of urban and agro forestry — actually working to improve the environment — was obviously linking these ethnically diverse Los Angeles residents. These community-based groups — many of whom are, for the most part, traditionally at odds with one another — were suddenly collaborating on work needs, objectives and goals of urban and agro forestry.

A significant objective of the Department of Agriculture's Presidential Task Force on the Los Angeles recovery efforts — empowering a responsible citizenry and facilitating the healing process — is truly being realized.

These ***Urban Greening Initiative*** partnerships will undoubtedly reap ongoing positive results. Furthermore, this networking opportunity is surely improving cross-cultural and cross-racial sensitivities and interactions. The ***Urban Greening Initiative*** is giving the City of Los Angeles so many benefits besides jobs and greening. It's offering a connection between a diversity of social groups — and the tools to talk to one another.

There's no question that this program is helping dismantle some of the root causes of Los Angeles' urban decay. ***Thus, the success of this initiative's approach in Los Angeles can serve as a blueprint for other major cities across this country.***

Visitors from all over the nation and even Israel have already traveled to Los Angeles to witness the broad range of urban forestry projects underway with ***Urban Greening Initiative*** matching grant monies.

Urban Greening Initiative: How We Did It

Significant Outreach Effort

A significant outreach effort was launched to ensure a widespread awareness of this special grant availability throughout the traditionally neglected areas of Los Angeles.

As part of this undertaking, the nearby Angeles National Forest and University of California Cooperative Extension Service — under its Urban Agricultural Forestry Initiative — circulated a request for proposals to more than 800 agencies, organizations and individuals via fliers, press releases, and personal letters.

In addition, to ensure all segments of the communities had a chance to participate, these 1,500 fliers — announcing and describing the program — were distributed in four different languages: Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and English. A special public service announcement was also circulated among Los Angeles radio stations.

Through this intensive community outreach during the grant availability process, churches and service clubs, as well as existing community forestry and greening groups, were encouraged to become involved directly, or function as umbrella groups — to allow the involvement of individuals and smaller community organizations such as block clubs.

These larger groups were also encouraged to assist the smaller, more loosely organized groups obtain matching funds and in-kind contributions. In doing so, groups without 501 c.3 tax-exempt status teamed up with umbrella tax-exempt organizations. LA Harvest and the University of California Cooperative Extension Service also served a valuable role in helping match these appropriate partners.

Several efforts were made to simplify the process. Grant application forms were modified to be user-friendly and non-bureaucratic. Forest Service representatives met one-on-one with grant recipients in their own communities to help them fill out the necessary forms. In addition, the Extension Service conducted two technical workshops — attended by approximately 150 people — to help provide information and assistance for potential **Urban Greening Initiative** grant applicants.

Primary Umbrella Group Grantees:

Three \$250 thousand grants were provided to capacity-building grass roots groups: L.A. Harvest; TreePeople; and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps. These three local organizations were identified as the most capable to instigate immediate urban and agro forestry job creation for long-term success.

These three primary umbrella grantees also agreed to provide training and assistance for smaller groups who lacked technical and administrative skills and experience.

The collective insights and experience of these three local grass roots umbrella groups helped expedite a quick and yet far-reaching start-up for the ***Urban Greening Initiative's*** broad-based matching grant program.

L.A. Conservation Corp

- Hire and train 75 young adults to work in the urban forestry industry. Twenty-four will complete a one-year training program preparing them for apprentice positions in the arborist field.
- Provide important support for long-term success of ***Urban Greening Initiative*** by helping community groups clear sites and maintain plantings.
- Help establish partnerships with local governments, industry and university systems.

Tree People

- Involve high school students in tree planting and greening in surrounding neighborhoods and communities to reduce *heat island* effects, and enhance pride and community ownership of local schools, businesses, and homes.
- Through their Citizen Forester Program, coordinate and train people in community-based groups to provide volunteer leadership in tree planting and tree care projects in local community green space development.

L.A. Harvest

- Coordinate and evaluate the ***Urban Greening Initiative's*** \$2,750,000 matching grant program. Develop broad neighborhood needs assessment for the Initiative's cooperating agencies and community groups.
- Expand urban and agro forestry projects to traditionally neglected areas of Los Angeles — including the development of youth and adults in production, marketing, and management activities.
- Provide USDA Forest Service liaison with grantees, including record keeping, feedback and grant results.
- Coordinate and train people in community-based groups to provide volunteer leadership in gardening and urban and agro forestry projects in local community green space development.

Reflecting A Cultural Diversity

Eighty-six individual grant application proposals — reflecting the cultural diversity of the area and a broad range of organizations and agencies — were submitted. After a thorough evaluation and ratings process by a special multicultural evaluation team, grant requests were prioritized and selected for funding based on: agroforestry and urban forestry objectives; job training potential; job creation potential; and location.

Of the 33 selected grantee projects, 25 encompass urban forestry; 7 involve urban agroforestry; and one is a demonstration garden project with juvenile offenders. Twenty-nine were awarded to nonprofit groups; three to local government cities; and one to the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Success Stories

Grantees Join Forces to Provide Better Environment, Jobs, Hope.

As you read this, in a plot of ground in South Central Los Angeles — where **no** truce yet exists between gangs — rival Crips and Bloods gang members nonetheless work together — literally side by side — with opposing Latino gang members.

This positive and beneficial transition is occurring in the John Hope Continuation School's horticulture project — an Urban Greening Initiative \$200 thousand grantee.

"I've been dreaming about this grant for a long time," project director George Singleton says of the Urban Greening matching monies that have helped sustain his school's urban garden and mini-orchard program activities.

"We have tremendous problems in this area. This is probably the worst area in South Central Los Angeles," Singleton says.

Even so, within his project, young men and women learn self-esteem and valuable skills as they train and prepare for positions in urban and agro forestry fields. Several organizations have already promised to give his graduates **jobs**.

In addition, another Urban Greening Initiative grantee recently teamed up with Singleton's efforts. The Offspring Urban Farms, a group that offers juvenile offenders the opportunity to learn skills in demonstration gardens, has joined forces with the John Hope Continuation School's horticulture project.

When youth have completed their incarceration time, they now have an opportunity to return to school and work at John Hope.

Likewise, Urban Greening Initiative grantee Alice Callaghan, director of Las Familias del Pueblo — an organization dedicated to providing housing to Los Angeles' skid row residents — has joined hands with fellow grantee LA Conservation Corps.

The two groups have collaborated to plant 40 trees in a desolate portion of the city's skid row area.

"Many street people approached us and expressed excitement over the idea of planting trees in their concrete jungle," says Callaghan. "I'm ecstatic that a government agency cared enough to try and bring the forest to those who could not reach it."

Examples of grantees and their proposed projects

The Pacific Asian Consortium

Improve existing agroforestry project. Adds three part-time employees. Will impact 30 families by providing food, green, and open space. Match is almost 40 to 1.

Search to Involve Philippino Americans

Agroforestry involving 40 youth in tree care and horticulture training; 200 youth, 12 senior citizens in environmental education; 7 partners.

South Central Los Angeles Regional Center for Developmentally Disabled Persons

Urban forestry project employing 20 people for 40 weeks.

Guatemala Support Network

Agroforestry, environmental education for 100 youth.

Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

Agroforestry demonstration project for community groups. Matched 3 to 1.

KARE (Kids Army to Rescue the Earth)

School project to create park. 75-plus students educated and trained. Materials, labor donated.

Aviva Center

Agroforestry and urban forestry at residential treatment center for abused and neglected children. Conduct training in citizen forestry.

Melrose Hill Neighborhood

Street trees and neighborhood involvement for 29 trees.

Korean Youth Center

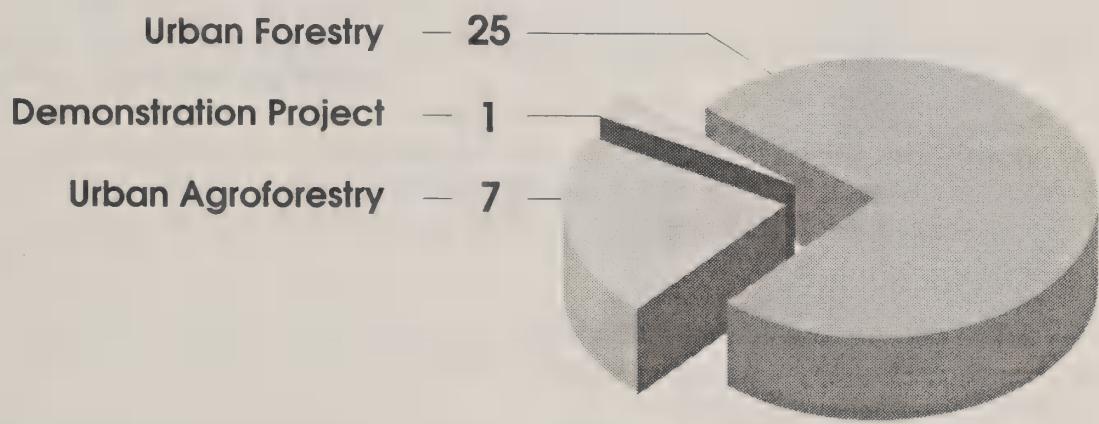
Urban forestry, youth operated. Planting trees in "Korea Town". Impacts 6,000 youth annually. Proposed project activities include networking with Los Angeles Latino youth group.

Faithful Central Missionary Baptist Church

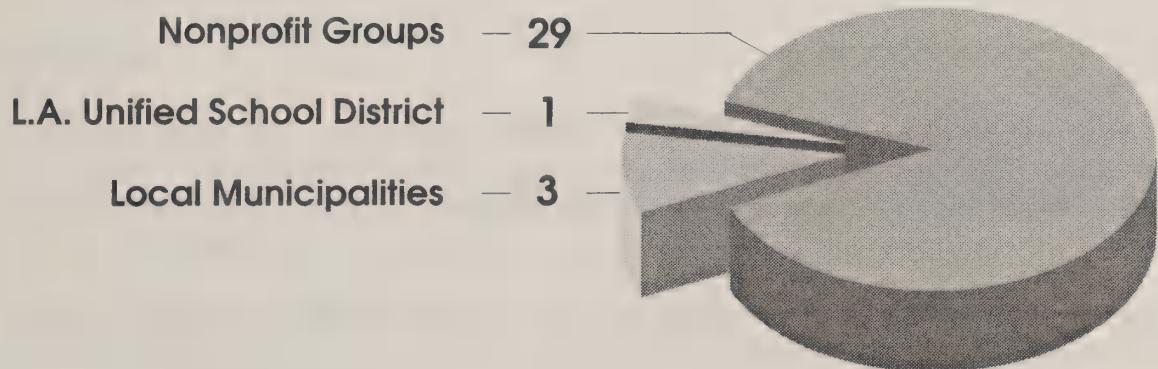
Involves 300 children in environmental education program, and on-the-job training for 10 in transitional living facility.

Urban Greening Projects Distribution

Nature of Project



Grant Recipients



Urban Greening Initiative: Grant Review and Evaluation Process

A seven-member multicultural, ethnically diverse review team was charged with screening the 86 proposals. The team was comprised of Hispanic, Korean, African-American, Laotian, and Caucasian members of the USDA Forest Service.

All grant application projects were plotted on a map to verify they originated in one of Los Angeles' 16 disturbance impacted communities. In this manner, an equitable geographic distribution of grantees was ensured.

"We are keeping all the grant requests that were not selected," explains John Ronald, the Forest Service's *Urban Greening Initiative* Program Manager. "And, we're sharing these requests with the various other umbrella agencies. We haven't ignored these grant requests."

Ronald said the Forest Service continues to seek additional funding from both public and private sources to assist with these remaining project proposals. As part of honoring this Forest Service commitment to try and ascertain more dollars for more of these projects, the non-selected applicants have also been informed about the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and California Releaf's sources of other urban forestry grant funds.

Follow-up

The Forest Service, State and Private Forestry branch, in partnership with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for follow-up, project monitoring, and evaluation of the 33 selected projects. Rebuild LA also continues to search for ways to further assist these groups.

In addition, LA Harvest will hire one or more persons from the impact area to monitor the grantee's project progress and potential problems, and to provide feedback for project tracking and future assistance.

These efforts will provide better ground service for the grantees, while maintaining up-to-date grant status information.

III Opportunity LA



Quoth Webster:

***“Opportunity* — A good chance or occasion, as to advance oneself.”**

“It feels good to work again. There’s lots of different people out here. But we all work together and show each other respect.”

Rick Rodriguez, 40

***Opportunity LA* Employee**

(unemployed seven months prior to this program’s availability)

“It’s always good to get some experience. The more you know, the better chance you have of getting a job. You also get some self-esteem back for yourself.”

James Lee, 35

Unemployed truck driver

***Opportunity LA* Employee**

Opportunity LA — *Training, Jobs, Hope*

Just four weeks after the April, 1992 Los Angeles civil disturbances, the USDA Forest Service had launched a full scale employment opportunity and job skills training program targeted to the city’s unemployed population.

Appropriately named ***Opportunity LA***, the undertaking — along with its Forest Service partner effort ***Urban Greening Initiative*** — served as an important strategy in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Presidential Task Force on the Los Angeles recovery efforts.

In the wake of the violent outbreak of urban unrest, this immediate \$5.8 million mission went into quick action to help mobilize the city’s rebuilding process by providing its residents meaningful employment and future job skills. Moreover, the program offered training and skill-building tasks that the 647-total ***Opportunity LA*** participants took back to their communities.

In addition, the program proved beneficial to the Forest Service by helping reduce a large backlog of necessary work projects on four Southern California national forests. These tasks represented a myriad of Forest Service responsibilities, including: facility repair; recreation site and trail maintenance; clerical and accounting needs; erosion control and watershed improvement; fire suppression; surveying; and visitor information staffing and services.

“The work accomplished by the **Opportunity LA** participants was of great quantity, good quality, and at a substantial cost savings to the Forest Service,” reports Larry Edmond, member of the **Opportunity LA** Forest Service administration team. “Carpenters, electricians, mechanics and masons remodeled interiors of buildings, built structures and repaired existing facilities. Acting as assistants, **Opportunity LA** clerical employees provided essential office support in personnel, logistics, finance, and public affairs.”

The six-month employment and job skills program, while open to all people 18 years and older, was aimed towards 18-25 year-olds — the population hit with the highest Los Angeles-area unemployment statistics. The program’s employee roster, however, eventually spanned from 18 to 63-year-olds.

Opportunity LA participants received from \$6.68 to \$9.34 per hour and were guaranteed 40 hours of work each week.

Logistically, numerous pick-up points were located throughout the city — to which **Opportunity LA** employees walked, drove, or rode busses. The Forest Service provided charter busses that collected people from these locations and transported them to five various “drop zones” — from which employees were then shuttled to their specific work sites. (Typically, an **Opportunity LA** employee could leave for work at 4 a.m. and not be home until 6 p.m.)

Job Recruitment Blitzkrieg: An Overwhelming Response

“Nobody could believe that there were really jobs. Every-one in my neighborhood thought it was a hoax. I had been wastin’ time and goin’ nowhere fast. At first, I was the only one in my neighborhood to check this out (Opportunity LA**). And when I actually got a job, all of my friends were shocked.”**

Richard Watson, 24
South Central Los Angeles resident
Opportunity LA Employee

"One young man said that he had not slept the night before because he was afraid he wouldn't wake up in time to get to the job. Another told me that he got up at 4:30 a.m. so he could be sure to make all his bus connections. All the people who spoke with me said that they were glad to get to work.

Another man said he filled out at least 40 applications and the Forest Service was the only organization that offered him employment. Though many of the people have spent little or no time in a forest environment, the overall comments I hear again and again are that people are happy to be working. They said they were ready to do anything the job required."

Judy Behrens, USDA Forest Service
Public Affairs Officer
Angeles National Forest

An intensive two-week job recruitment blitzkrieg by a special 14-member Forest Service team included circulating 5,000 informational fliers in four languages (Spanish, Korean, Chinese and English) throughout the city's civil unrest impacted and high unemployment areas — ensuring all Los Angeles area residents had an opportunity to participate. In addition, 65 organizations — including grass roots community groups with special sensitivities to the area's needs — were contacted to help with distribution.

The effort reaped an overwhelming response.

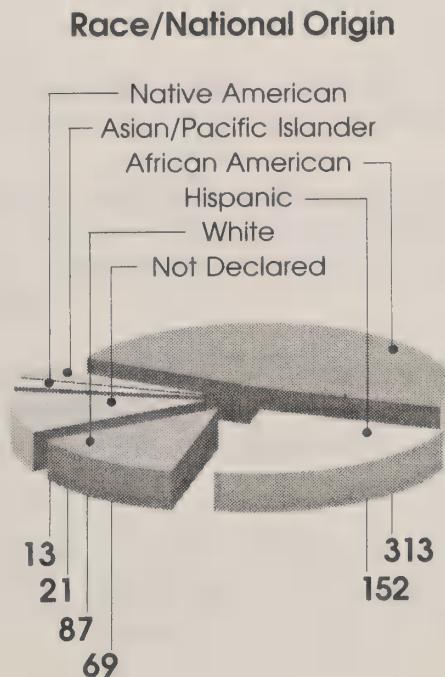
A total of 2,200 people submitted applications for the initially available 560 **Opportunity LA** positions. The Forest Service made a concerted effort to ensure that the application process was as user-friendly as possible — accepting simple resumes for the initial application, then assisting applicants in properly completing the traditional (and sometimes cumbersome) "SF 171 Application for Federal Employment" form. Forest Service personnel, in conjunction with Office of Personnel Management specialists, worked seven days a week to process the applications as quickly as possible.

Demographics: A Diverse Cross Section

The **Opportunity LA** hires represented a fairly diverse cross section of age and ethnic backgrounds from both sexes. They also shared an equally wide range of skills and experiences. (See adjacent chart for specific demographics.)

Opportunity LA Employees Race, Gender, National Origin

Gender	Race/National Origin	Hired	Finish	Gender of Participants
Male	Native American	12	8	
	Asian/Pacific Islander	18	12	
	African American	254	179	
	Hispanic	141	97	
	White	72	51	
	Not Declared	51	43	
Total		548	390	107  548 
Female	Native American	1	1	
	Asian/Pacific Islander	3	2	
	African American	59	51	
	Hispanic	11	8	
	White	15	11	
	Not Declared	18	11	
Total		107	84	107  Male
Both	Native American	13	9	
	Asian/Pacific Islander	21	14	
	African American	313	230	
	Hispanic	152	105	
	White	87	62	
	Not Declared	69	54	
Total		655	474	



Developing Skills — *Providing Hope*

“This program is giving me a lot of hope. It’s the best thing I ever did. I filled an application out on Tuesday, and they called me Thursday. I have so much gratitude for this government.”

Barry Stewart, 50
Salvation Army shelter resident
Opportunity LA Employee

“Having a good job like this keeps you straight and out of trouble. There are no jobs in the city — just McDonalds and selling peanuts on the freeway. If that’s all there is, I’ll probably fall back into drugs and gangs.”

Ricardo Sanchez, 22
East Los Angeles resident
Opportunity LA Employee

Ongoing activities and training were designed to develop skills in these temporary **Opportunity LA** employees that could lead to permanent jobs back in the community.

Program employees acquired a diversity of job skills and training, including: career hunting, job interview and resume writing techniques; supervisory training; clerical skills; fire fighting training and experience; first aid and CPR; vehicle maintenance; chainsaw operation; masonry skills; roofing; and general construction.

State of California Employee Development Department representatives also visited with **Opportunity LA** employees just prior to the program’s Dec. 18, 1992 completion, to match available skills to existing positions, and to establish unemployment profiles on interested individuals.

In December, as the program came to a close, networks put out the word that a pool of skilled employees was available. USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) coordinated with the Forest Service to notify all **Opportunity LA** alumni of fifty available positions within the Los Angeles area.

At this same time, the Los Angeles Free Clinic contacted the Forest Service requesting a list of potential job applicants for an opening in its Project STEP, a federal grant-funded program operated through the Hollywood Beautification Project. (Through an earlier **Urban Greening Initiative** grant workshop, the Free Clinic agency had learned that the **Opportunity LA** employee pool listing would still be available after the program’s conclusion.)

Likewise, other ***Urban Greening Initiative*** grantees have offered to hire departing ***Opportunity LA*** personnel. This beneficial networking system illustrates a satisfying connection between the two programs initiated at the ***Urban Greening Initiative*** grant recipient workshops and continued at the ***Opportunity LA*** Job Fair.

More than 25 partner organizations offered volunteer assistance to help make this employment mobilization a success. Contributors — who later received Forest Service certificates of merit in a special appreciation ceremony — saved the government more than \$300,000.

“Nobody should be scared of us. We’re just up here to work. I want to be a fireman. That would be a good job, and this will hopefully get me a good recommendation.”

Fernando Gonzales
Opportunity LA Employee

“Some of our jobs are boring, like picking up picnic ground trash. Some are hot and tedious, like chopping weeds on tree plantations. Some are exciting, like driving far on a dirt road to reach a wilderness trailhead. And some of the jobs are fun, like clearing up rock dams from a creek so native fish might have a better chance of surviving.

All the jobs are important, and we’re glad to be doing something positive for the forest.”

Anton Sommer
Opportunity LA Employee

A Temporary, Positive, Productive Environment

A total of 647 people were hired — in stages — throughout the six-month ***Opportunity LA*** program.

At the program’s Dec. 18 conclusion, 445 people were still employed. Several program employees worked on until Jan. 13, 1993, to perform close-out activities.

As previously stated, the ***Opportunity LA*** program was **not** designed to offer permanent job placement for its participants. Rather, it was intended to create a temporary positive, productive environment where citizens of the riot-impacted areas could train, improve their job resumes, and earn a living as their communities likewise recuperated and rehabilitated.

The program successfully provided an opportunity for people to get on with their lives in the wake of the unrest. ***It was never intended to serve as a final solution.*** Therefore, the overall results, effects and long-term benefits of this program cannot be easily determined at this time. Future sociological studies will eventually reveal the program’s long-term net impacts.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

IV Conclusion - Amazement and Appreciation



“The last few days have been so exciting. We’ve been developing a video on the Urban Greening Initiative project – driving the streets of Los Angeles, meeting with grant recipients and video taping their preliminary efforts. The experience has been incredibly gratifying. The people we have met and interviewed are deeply committed to their projects and the people they are assisting. They all expressed amazement and appreciation at the responsiveness of the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture in contributing to the Los Angeles recovery effort.”

Randi R. Jorgensen,
USDA Forest Service
Public Affairs Specialist
Angeles National Forest

Where Do We Go From Here?

The success of both of these programs was centered on:

- ❖ Funding targeted specifically for these programs
- ❖ A willingness to innovate, simplify, and not necessarily do it “the way we always have.”

No single program can cure the ills that led to the uprising in Los Angeles. Yet, if allowed to continue and encouraged, programs such as these can serve as much more than mere Band-Aids.

Opportunity LA and the ***Urban Greening Initiative*** have proven to be catalysts that bring people together and get them talking and working for a common goal. These efforts have truly helped empower the community, generated enthusiasm, and raised expectations.

Now, it is imperative that we keep this momentum moving forward.

Both of these innovative undertakings will receive ongoing evaluation aimed at sharing and applying lessons learned with future efforts.

The seeds for a restored and improved inner-city Los Angeles have been planted. Further support of these and similar programs will provide the nourishment that will allow these seeds of hope to actually flower and grow.

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